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REPORT



OF

THE COMMITTEE OF VISITORS


OF THE

COUNTY OF WARWICK

PAUPER LUNATIC ASYLUM.

1859.

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REPORT.

THE Committee of Visitors of the County Pauper Lunatic Asylum, in presenting to the public a Statement of the Condition and Management of the Asylum during the past year, 1859, have not thought it requisite, or convenient, to publish again, so soon after their last Report, the mass of statistical detail contained in the Tables appended to that Report.

On the present occasion, they simply print, for distribution through the County, the Annual Report of Dr. Parsey, the Resident Medical Superintendent, addressed to the Committee of Visitors, in compliance with the Rules of the Asylum ; which, in the opinion of the Committee, contains, in a clear and lucid statement, much valuable information on the state and condition of the Patients, and the general working of the Asylum. The Committee of Visitors participate with Dr. Parsey in the regret he expresses at the necessity which has arisen of closing the Asylum, for the present, against the admission of Private Patients above the rank of paupers. In reference to the concluding paragraph of Dr. Parsey's Report, it is a gratification to the Committee to have it in their power to state that, under the Medical Superintendent, and the other officers more immediately connected with the management, the progress of the Asylum, throughout the year, has been highly satisfactory. The Committee have also satisfaction in stating that, in the course of the last year, they have been enabled to reduce the weekly charge for each Pauper Patient from 8s. 9d. to 8s. 6d., at which it remains ; and which they believe to be below the average charge for Pauper Patients in Lunatic Asylums generally through the country.

DR. PARSEY'S REPORT.

I BEG, according to custom, to submit to the Committee a Statement of the movements of the Patients during the past Year, with a few remarks on matters arising out of, or connected with, the general management and discipline of the Asylum.

At the commencement of the year 1859 there were 300 inmates—151 males and 149 females—283 of them being chargeable as paupers, and 17 as private patients. In the course of the year there have been 122 admissions—a number much larger than that of any preceding year;—only 96 of them, however, were received from the Parishes of this County; 17 others, viz., five males and 12 females, were private patients, admitted in the earlier months of the year when we were still able to accommodate that class; and nine, viz., six males and three females, were moved here on the last day of the year, from the Asylum for the Borough of Birmingham, having been previously maintained there as lunatics found in that borough, and without ascertained settlement. Of the 96 paupers admitted as chargeable to Unions or Parishes in this County 54 were males and 42 females.

In the course of the year 69 inmates have left the Asylum, and 37 have died—leaving, at its termination, 315 residents, and one out on trial. Of those that have left 16 males were the chronic cases returned to the Asylum for the County of Gloucester; 10 were discharged improved; two unimproved; and one from defect in the medical certificates, on which he was sent here; the remaining 40 were recovered.

The transfer of the Gloucester patients created many vacancies on the male side at the beginning of the year; but an unusual influx of male patients, amounting to 23 in the first quarter, quickly brought back our numbers to their former standard. This, with the ordinary increase of females, rendered it necessary, by Midsummer, to dis-

continue the admission of poor private patients ; and, as there is no probability of a diminution of the paupers ; but, on the contrary, a continuous slight increase, up to a certain point, must be anticipated ; it is not likely that you will be again able to offer the advantages of the Asylum to a class, which, above all others at the present time, is deficient in facilities for proper care and treatment, at an expense compatible with their restricted means. Private Asylums are now closed against them, because their payments are not sufficiently remunerative, and their presence among a higher class of patients is considered objectionable. Public Asylums are, with very few exceptions, appropriated exclusively to paupers. Bethlem and St. Luke's Hospitals, in London, alone throw their doors open to all comers from among the humbler classes, free of charge, provided there is nothing in the individual case involving a probability of its being incurable ; but, if uncured at the expiration of twelve months, they must be removed by their friends, and the same difficulty, viz., where to send them, be experienced. Proper accommodation for this numerous class is, consequently, almost nominal ; and there appears but one way of making a satisfactory provision for them ; that is, by the erection, from subscriptions, or other available sources, of Asylums, on much the same principle, and under similar management, as our County Asylums, in which the charges made to the patients' friends shall only be such as will cover the actual expense incurred. An indirect provision for them is, to some extent, afforded by facilities being offered to the friends by their respective parishes for making some arrangement, whereby they may be sent as paupers to the County Asylum, the relatives and the parish sharing the expense. This course has nothing to recommend it but expediency, whilst it is open to many objections, among which prominently stand the consequent social degradation of the recipients, and the unjust additional burden thrown on the poorer ratepayers, by their partial contribution to the support of individuals whom the law never contemplated as demanding their aid.

Though the admissions during the year have exceeded those of any preceding one, the condition, either mental or physical, of more than half of them was so opposed to any probability of recovery as

to be reasonably set down as incurable : advanced disorganization of brain or other vital organs, idiocy, the complication of epilepsy, or long protracted mental disorder, indicating that little more was to be done than to administer to their daily wants, to endeavour to develop what remained of their original mental capacity, or, in many cases, to smooth their sure progress to the grave. The large proportion of cases of this nature necessarily suggests that this Asylum is still regarded too much as a mere receptacle for cases of mental disorder and decay, inconvenient or troublesome to be longer treated in their homes or Union houses, instead of an Institution specially adapted to the care and treatment of insanity in its earlier and more curable stages.

Of the admissions this year less than six per cent. have been previously under treatment in this Asylum ; and of the cases of discharge, as recovered, during the seven and a half years since its opening, only eighteen per cent. have more than once become its inmates. Though experience from this source is too limited for the deduction of any independent inference, it tends to confirm other observations, that, in persons recovering from an attack of insanity, the probability of a relapse is not greater than in the majority of ordinary serious diseases to which we are liable.

It is a common remark of strangers, and even of those more accustomed to the general inspection of Asylums, that a large proportion of the inmates appear perfectly quiet and inoffensive ; and it is to many a subject of surprise that their detention is considered necessary ; and that they cannot be equally well taken care of in the Union houses, or by their friends. This view of their condition is, so far as mere superficial observation is concerned, very reasonable, but it is practically very fallacious. Many of the patients, whose appearance more especially elicits such remarks, have been sent to the Asylum simply because they have become quite unmanageable in the Unions ; and to the experienced observer present the most striking examples of the beneficial effects of the present treatment of insanity as practiced in Asylums. The facilities for classification, the moderate amount of general control exercised to check or remove sources of irritation to individuals, com-

bined with the absence of vexatious interference, the increased social comforts, liberal dietary, attention to general health, and invigorating effect of a well-chosen locality, combine to smooth and subdue the asperities arising in those suffering from chronic mental disease, who, under the ordinary influences of the society in which their lot was previously cast, were liable continually to display mischievous or violent propensities, when subjected to any unusual, though, perhaps, trifling sources of irritation. And that this is not a mere theoretical speculation, but a practical fact, is continually exemplified by the readiness with which the majority of cases of chronic insanity, sent as no longer manageable, settle down into a state of quiet inoffensive indifference; and less frequently, and less satisfactorily, but still more strikingly, demonstrated by the unfavourable issue to the individual patient, who, in consequence of the application of parochial authorities, or the importunities of relatives, or sometimes with the view of making room for more acute cases, is, from his apparent inoffensiveness, allowed to be removed from the Asylum. A somewhat extended experience has shown that these latter cases very rarely indeed do well; that most of them quickly deteriorate, and manifest all the old characteristics that first rendered their removal to an Asylum necessary; and that they gradually find their way back in a condition of both bodily and mental health much lower than that in which they were at their discharge.

Another class, about the propriety of whose removal to an Asylum much erroneous impression exists among those whose attention is only partially drawn to the subject, is that of the epileptics. By many it is supposed that the mere existence of epilepsy, a bodily disease, is a sufficient legal justification for their detention—an opinion utterly incorrect. There is, unfortunately, in many cases of epilepsy of protracted or severe character, a tendency to persistent morbid changes, producing mental decay, or the more active forms of mental disease; and it is only when these psychical disturbances are of a nature demanding special care that such cases are received into Asylums. Once there it is very rare for them to return to Society; because all forms of mental disturbance, resulting from or complicated

with epilepsy, are among those presenting the smallest probability of recovery ; on the contrary, their tendency is slowly to degenerate, so that the epileptics in Asylums, instead of being improperly confined there, have to take their position, ultimately, if not immediately, among those affected with the worst forms of mental disorder. Of the maniacal, they are the most dangerous ; of the demented, the most lost ; of the idiots, the most debased. Fourteen of them have been admitted here in the past year ; and the whole number of epileptics now in the Asylum is forty-seven, viz., twenty-nine males and eighteen females.

Of the deaths during the year, eight were occasioned by general paralysis ; three by apoplexy ; four by chronic disorganization of the brain, with or without convulsions ; eight by general decay and old age ; four by exhausting mania ; five by consumption ; one by carbuncle ; one by chronic asthma ; and one by mesenteric disease. It is satisfactory to be able to state that, from the opening of the Asylum, I have not had to record a death by suicide.

There have been periodic variations in the general health of the patients, but only similar to those experienced in the community at large ; and we have throughout the year enjoyed an immunity from anything beyond the ordinary average of sickness.

In the case of an old man with extensive and dangerous carbuncle, and who persisted in tearing off all dressings, I found it necessary to restrain the hands with a handkerchief, as his interference with the wound endangered life. This restraint was required for only about two hours—as, finding the irksomeness of it, and how easily he was defeated in his object, he promised no longer to interfere with the dressings, and kept his word. There are no advocates for the treatment of the insane in Asylums without mechanical restraint who do not recognise the occasional necessity for its appliance in surgical cases.

In general management and discipline there has been no deviation from the practice of former years ; and the occupations and amusements have been much as before recorded, and with similar results. In their detail, the only novel subject meriting notice has been the

holding, in the summer, of a bazaar for the sale of work made by the patients, aided by contributions from the officers and their friends. The intention of this bazaar, in addition to the pleasure and change afforded by the preparation of articles for it, was to establish a fund for the assistance of necessitous discharged patients, and for contributing to the amusements and comforts of the permanent inmates. Both these objects must so commend themselves to all personally interested in the Asylum, that, I am sure, those of the Committee who are not already aware of it, will be gratified to know that more than £35 were realized. For £10 of this sum we were indebted to the liberal kindness of Mrs. Ryland, of Barford. A lady, who has herself experienced the affliction of temporary mental aberration, sympathising with the inmates of this Asylum, sent me also, this Christmas, £5, to use as I thought proper for their benefit.

The alterations effected during the latter part of the year, for improving the hot and cold water supply and heating and ventilation throughout the building, are of such importance, in connexion with the proper sanitary condition of the patients, as to demand some notice. With the gradual increase in our numbers, it was found that in all these important details, the provision made in the original construction of the Asylum was either inadequate or imperfectly carried out. Considerable improvements have been made under the direction and plans of Mr. Rosser, C. E.; and, though there has been as yet scarcely time to test the merits of the various changes, (some of which are scarcely completed,) it can be confidently said that great benefit has already been derived from them. The cold water cisterns in the higher parts of the building are doubled in capacity; and there is now for the wards, *at all times*, a supply of hot water more than double what formerly existed. In substituting hot water for steam pipes, to produce the necessary elevation of temperature in cold weather, the heating surface has been doubled, the passage of air over it properly regulated, and the conducting flues so altered as to prevent waste of heat in its ascent to the wards. A consequent agreeable nearly uniform temperature can be insured in cold weather; the day rooms continuing to be heated by open fire-places. The con-

struction of the windows does not permit sufficient communication with the external air for complete ventilation in unfavourable weather ; and the artificial aid originally provided consisted of perpendicular flues, passing from the upper part of each sleeping room into the space immediately under the ordinary slate roofs ; this space communicating at one end with a ventilating tower, in which was no appliance to insure an upward current. For the purpose of ventilation, this was almost nominal ; but has now been made tolerably efficient, (and, when completed, is expected by the engineer to be quite so,) by the connection of the original perpendicular flues with larger horizontal ones passing under the roofs, and communicating with the ventilating tower, in which a steam-heated coil produces a strong upward current.

These additional means of heating and ventilating, and the increased water supply, ought to be sufficient for all our wants of this nature, and appear likely to be so.

Throughout the year I have had the active co-operation of the other officers of the Asylum, and hope that in the performance of our duties we have obtained the approval of the Committee.

W. H. PARSEY, M. D.

JANUARY, 1860.

